

West Harris Crofting Trust

Minutes 17th August 09, Seilebost School 7.30pm

BUSINESS

Apologies: Murdo, Angus, Roddy, Gordon.

Attending: Neil, Richard, Finlay, Rhoda, Mairi, Bobby

In addition Murdo Maclellan, Hugh Macintosh & Amanda from Crofters Commission attended.

1) **Buyout update**

Neil advised that HIE had approved £10,000 grant for architects/surveyors fees to assess house sites. TIG had also offered £20,000 loan for either estate purchase or house development costs.

Simon Fraser was waiting a response from the Government solicitors to the latest draft of the conveyance.

2) **Renewable Energy Conference**

No directors able to attend, Neil will try at short notice

3) **Brochure/Website**

The quotation from Black House Creative was accepted

4) **Wind Power Feasibility Study**

It was agreed to include West Harris in the CES Study of community land

5) **Crofters Commission**

Hugh advised that the Crofters Commission have set up a small team 'supporting crofting unit' with the aim of supporting a small number of willing communities (six). The aim would be to tackle absenteeism & neglect of croft land, releasing crofts to bring in new entrants to strengthen communities. The process would have to be fair & equitable, all tenants in township treated equally.

The importance of stock on the hills was emphasised, hopefully additional incentives would be given to encourage this, LFAS, SRDP etc.

We need to prove a demand for crofts, absentees & 'neglectful' tenants can be challenged now by CC with support of landlord.

2007 Act introduced power to CC.

Option 1 tenant to present a plan to bring croft back into use

Option 2 Go to Land Court with a view to terminating.

The commission will now seek to be more involved at a strategic level in formulation local plans rather than targeting individual de-crofting plans. i.e. if local plan presumes against de-crofting for house sites in a particular community then unlikely to be successful.

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The initiative by the CC to target absenteeism is believed to have attracted 600 new residents to the crofts targeted.

Subletting is actively encouraged by the CC, maximum 3 years for absentee, 7 for resident.

It was agreed to have a follow up meeting in the Autumn when the estate has been transferred, inviting all tenants with a leaflet circulated in advance. The aim would be to encourage the release of crofts without enforcement. The CC would set out crofters obligations, the rules & regulations & a discussion would follow with the hope that this would encourage some of the older crofters to think about transfer. Funds are unlikely to be available for a croft entrant scheme.

New tenants for the West Side would not be excluded if they already had another croft in an other area provided it was reasonable to work both.

Neil & Murdo are continuing to meet regularly on Mondays from 12noon until 2.00pm to work on the business plan/lottery application; any additional directors available please feel free to attend

NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed later but probably 21st September 7.30pm

Neil Campbell
Secretary

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